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BAGHDAD FOR POL, NCT, PAO

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SUBJECT: (C) PM BARZANI TO PARDON KAMAL QADR KARIM IN NEXT FEW DAYS

REF: (A) KIRKUK 70, (B) KIRKUK 22, (C) KIRKUK 7

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. KRG PM Barzani told RC(A) March 29 that he would pardon Kurdish political activist Kamal Qadr Karim "in the next three to four days." We suspect they will deport him. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) While discussing human rights with RC(A) March 29 in relation to the riot in Halabjah (septel), Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani brought up the case of Austrian citizen and Kurdish political activist Kamal Qadr Karim. Barzani said the case had not been worth the trouble it had caused. He said Qadr had even told the media Qadr did not repent because his imprisonment had made him famous. Barzani said neither he nor (his uncle) KRG President Masud Barzani had been present when the case had arisen. The PM said he had ended up discussing the case every week in his office. Barzani said flatly that Qadr was not a security risk, "though if he were, I would stand by the decision to sentence him."

¶3. (C) Barzani said he would pardon Qadr "in the next two to three days." RC(A) jumped in to agree this was the best decision and to say he would report this to Washington. Now on a roll (and realizing he had now committed himself), the PM said he would even meet with Qadr after his release and tell him he was free to leave or stay in Kurdistan. He said the pardon would cover all the charges against Qadr. When, at the end of the conversation, PM Barzani repeated he would pardon Qadr, he lengthened it to "the next three or four days."

¶4. (C) Barzani said even the Austrian government had documented that Qadr was mentally unbalanced. Barzani recounted that Qadr had approached President Barzani on a Vienna street five years ago to complain that the president of Salah ad Din University had unfairly dismissed him from the faculty. The PM said President Barzani had had the KRG-E pay for Qadr's air ticket to return to Erbil and had launched an investigation. When it showed Qadr, not the university, at fault, Qadr had started writing articles against the Barzanis. Barzani mused that Qadr was even "from a good family." (COMMENT: Loyalty in the KDP is fundamentally by clan, so Barzani saw someone from a "good family" writing such attacks as particularly egregious.
END NOTE.)

¶5. (SBU) BACKGROUND: As reported reftels and previous, Qadr published vitriolic personal and political attacks against the Barzanis on the internet from Austria. When he returned to the KRG, authorities arrested him and a KRG-E court sentenced him on

December 19 to 30 years for defaming public institutions (the Erbil Governorate and the KRG-E internal security organization, the Asayish). On January 19, the KRG-E Criminal Cassation Court overturned the conviction and returned the case to the investigative court to look into charges of criminal defamation (Article 433 of Iraqi Law 111 of 1969). A KRG-Erbil court convicted Qadr on March 26 of criminal defamation and sentenced him to 18 months in jail. END BACKGROUND.

¶6. (C) COMMENT. KRG officials have long said the PM would pardon Qadr once he was convicted. The British Consul General reports that the KRG's representative in the UK said the KRG worried that if Qadr were released and stayed in the Kurdistan Region, vigilantes might harm him and the KRG would get the blame. We therefore suspect that the KRG will instead deport him.

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